

GLOBAL NEWS FLOW DEBATE IN THE ERA OF SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS: IS THE U.S MEDIA STILL THE WORLD'S NEWS LEADER?

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Abstract

The News Flow Debate (NFD), which is about the imbalance in the flow of news internationally, has continued to generate interest in communication research. This is because the issues that gave birth to the debate in the first instance have remained fluid, notwithstanding the impact of social media on the unidirectional flow of news and information due to the liberalization and proliferation of the newsgathering and dissemination processes at the grassroots level. This study analyzes the content of U.S. media coverage to determine the impact of social media on the content and flow of news in the United States. In other words, this study hopes to find if traditional media organizations in the U.S. are still setting public agenda in the era of social media networks popularity.

Keywords: News flow, news flow debate (NFD), social media, news democratization, mass participation, agenda setting, traditional media organizations, U.S. media.

Introduction

The debate on the global flow of news has remained fluid with the emergence of social media, which have contributed to the liberalization of sourcing, disseminating, and gatekeeping of news via online and digital platforms. The News Flow Debate (NFD) is a conceptual framework whereby developing nations demanded for a change in the present pattern of news flow between them and the Western industrialised nations. This debate was a core issue in the now stalled discourse on the New World Information and Communication Order (Sreberny-Mohammed *et al*, 1984; Ekeanyanwu, 2006; 2008; de Beer, 2010). The debate was basically about “Free Flow” or “Free and Balanced Flow” of information between the western developed nations and the underdeveloped or mildly put, the developing societies in the South part of the world.

This study therefore analyzes the global news flow debate in the light of social media networks to determine whether some of the issues of “free flow” and “free and balanced flow” still reverberate even with the emergence of social media networks and their tendencies towards news liberalization. This study is also expected to determine the impact of social media networks on the media agenda setting theory.

The importance of this study cannot be overemphasized. The emergence of social media networks has encouraged mass participation of the ordinary public, news liberalization, citizens/individual’s engagement in news production and dissemination business, as well as news democratization. This is the current situation that was not envisaged during the introductory stages of the news flow debate. It is important therefore to study the impact of this new phenomenon on the news flow debate. Second, recent happenings especially the mobilisation of the people for mass revolts in the Muslim Arab States (The Arab Spring) suggests that the social media networks have been accepted and therefore cannot be wished away. How this plays up in the context of the current analysis of news flow debate is worth studying.

The two questions that drive this study are:

1. Is the news flow debate still relevant with the emergence of social media networks in the news production and distribution business?
2. Is the traditional media still setting public agenda in this era of social media networks popularity?

Background to the News Flow Debate

The antecedent to the call for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) centres on the view by the developing nations that the existing order is unfavourable and unacceptable to them. This is supported by the findings of the MacBride Commission which investigated the claims and released its findings which indicted the west in its handling of global flow of news (MacBride *et al*, 1981).

The MacBride Commission, however, noted that part of this imbalance is often branded the logical consequence of the developed gap between the industrialized nations and the third world. In their counter claims, some of the western nations on the opposing side of the debate at the UNESCO forum argued that the world is a free marketplace of ideas where information/news flow should be free and unhindered. Okigbo (1996) was, however, worried that even though the world is a free marketplace of ideas where information flow should not be hindered; he observed that the west's refusal to recognize anything insidious in the virtual saturation of the underdeveloped African nations with news reports and cultural artefacts originating from the West at the detriment of African political, economic, and cultural stability should be of global concern. Third World journalists and scholars, on their part, counter-charged that what the West call global "free flow" of information and news is, in fact, a euphemism for the economic, political and cultural domination of developing nations by the West with the aid of its powerful transnational news agencies. The major focus of the developing nations' grievance is that there is a deliberate attempt by the developed countries, especially the western world, to exploit the advantages of their industrial and economic superiority to establish and perpetuate domination in mass media systems over the developing nations both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Quantitative imbalance is about the amount of news flowing from industrialized nations to the un-industrialized nations and vice versa. For instance, if a content analysis of CNN, BBC etc is carried out, it is likely that out of 100 news stories, maybe only 10 will be about the un-industrialized nations put together. Ekeanyanwu (2005) also noted that out of the paltry 10 news stories about the un-industrialized nations, nine maybe all negatives. This is qualitative imbalance. Ekeanyanwu (2007) further argues that South nations never get a mention in the media of the western world unless the bizarre or disaster/crisis oriented event occurs. The implication for this is that news about poverty, hunger, political struggles, diseases, wars, coup d'états, disasters and other forms of crises are reported in the Western

media. These same types of unfavourable news are relayed back to the developing countries (Ekeanyanwu, 2007).

Egwu (2001:20) highlighted the South's situation in 2001 by juxtaposing its situation to the media saturation in the United States:

The United States has over 25,000 periodicals [By 2001]; over 1,200 book publishers; over 10,000 radio stations (AM & FM); over 1,000 television stations; and some 26million other types of (e.g. citizens band) Radios. There is therefore a situation of media monopoly by the North, not only in hardware, but also in software. News Agencies also abound in the North... to the annoying neglect and marginalization of the South, especially Africa.

A comparative content analysis of four British and American newspaper's coverage showed that only 0.1% of the entire news space was dedicated to African news over a period of four months (Nwosu, 1987). This revealed serious under-reporting of Africa. That study also supported earlier findings that much of the Western reporting on Africa is characterized by "bush fire" journalism where crises predominate to the vital exclusion of development-oriented news.

The developed nations also dominated the international flow of news well into the 1990s due to their domination of the world communication systems and resources, which include news agencies, satellite broadcast facilities, newspapers and magazines (Okunna, 1993). World news had always been dominated by the "Big Four" international news agencies: Reuters headquartered in the United Kingdom, the Associated Press, which is based in the U.S., United Press International, also based in the U.S., and Agence France Presse, which is based in France (Okunna, 1993). Third World countries have made good progress in reducing their dependence on other types of imported western media programs and reduced their total reliance on the "Big Four" for world news.

Despite the establishment of national and regional news agencies, this situation has not changed in the last two decades as much as it necessary to democratize communication in the world. In Africa, for instance, there is still increasing concern among African countries that the news coverage of their affairs by foreign news agencies is grossly inadequate (Ochogwu, 1987: 7; Golan, 2008; de Beer, 2010). While most media houses in Africa have regular slots and spaces for news originating from the developed world, African countries are

either not being covered at all in the media of the western world (quantitative) or endure malicious negative news reports about events in these countries (qualitative).

The MacBride Commission, which was set up in December 1977 by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to study communication problems globally states in her final report that:

News flows tend towards a North-South direction and inhibit development of exchanges between developing countries themselves. While there is a flood of news on the east / west axis between North America and Europe, as well as, although on a lower level, between socialist and western countries, the much lesser one-way flow between North and South can hardly be called an exchange due to the excessive imbalance. There are, obviously, various reasons, both inside developing countries and on the international scene, which prevent media from counteracting the blanketing effect of the one-way flow.

This belief has been reinforced by the Timbergen report (cited in Ekeanyanwu 2007) to the “Club of Rome” on information flow in 1977. The report states: “It must also be recognized that international dissemination has long formed the subject of discriminatory practices ... the monopolistic and discriminatory practices inherent in current international information dissemination must be deemed as one of the worst”.

The argument here is that communication according to MacBride *et. al* (1981); has become an “exchange between two unequal protagonists without necessarily having to compete, but instead allows the predominance of the more powerful, the richer and the better equipped to continue to monopolize the flow of news”. Momoh (1988:7) strengthens this view, when he states thus: “It is common knowledge that news from Third World countries usually make their appearance in the media of developed countries only when they are sensational and border on drama strong enough to arouse their sensibilities and sense of curiosity”.

Okigbo (1990:6) also points out “despite the fact that the developing countries account for about 75 percent of the world population, less than 30 percent of world news coverage is devoted to them”. Okigbo argues further that this leads to a perpetual under-covering of the regions, the ultimate result of which is lack of adequate information about these areas”. He goes on to say that the flow of world news is mostly unidirectional. Thus, according to him, the average South citizen is more likely to know more about the western world than the Third World. This paucity of news flow from the Third World to the western world also means that the average westerner is likely to know very little about the Third World. This inadequate and biased flow of international news around the globe has led to the perpetuation of some prejudices and the holding of certain attitudes that do not support global co-operation based on fairness, equity and just treatment (Okigbo, 1990:6).

Literature Review

The NWICO, as envisaged by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was a stillborn when it was mooted in the late 70s. It was a legitimate demand though, but wrongly timed and poorly conceived because the socio-economic situation of the un-industrialized nations then could not support such an agitation. The prevailing power structure during the mooted stage was also entirely in favor of the west against the east or south. The countries that were supposed to champion the cause could not even pay their annual subscription to the United Nations or financially support UNESCO.

The publication of the MacBride Report in 1980, which compiled the South grievances against the West including the imbalances, did not go down well with the advanced Western industrialized nations. This led the United States, United Kingdom, and Singapore to pull out of UNESCO. Their reason was that the NWICO Declaration, which had the support of UNESCO, was “an endemic hostility towards the institution of free press, free markets, and above all individual human rights” (Ekeanyanwu, 2006:13).

UNESCO, however, remained resolute notwithstanding her dwindling financial resources as a result of the pullout of some of these influential members from the body. The organization insisted that freedom of information is an explosion of information in all directions and not in one direction alone (Ekeanyanwu, 2008). The body maintained further that freedom and liberty should not be the exclusive preserve of any group no matter how powerful or highly placed. UNESCO concluded in its final resolution on the issue that the

demand for NWICO will bring more justice, more equity, more reciprocity in information exchange, less dependence in communication flow, less vertical or downward diffusion of messages, more self reliance, more benefit for mankind and enhanced cultural autonomy and identity (MacBride et al, 1981).

The reaction of the west to third world complaints has not been unidirectional. Literature emanating from some western scholars (Rosenblum, 1978; Stevenson and Gaddy, 1982; Merrill, 1983; Hanitzsch, 2009) admit the charges of imbalance but note that even the third world was biased too in its coverage of the rest of the world; because, “bias is characteristic of every journalism” (Merrill, 1983).

In defense of the western hegemony over global news flows pattern, Stevenson and Gaddy (1982) objected the claims that the African media systems are captives of the Western news agencies. They argued that the complaints of the developing world against the Western media were generally problems of journalism practice. Stevenson and Gaddy (1982) asserted that third world editors are to blame for their over-selection of conflict news events from the Western wire services. They pointed out that since conflict is newsworthy, the imbalance in global news flow was a reflection of events and that there were more international conflicts in the third world than elsewhere in the world.

However, Gerald Long, the former General Manager of Reuters, quoted by Rosenblum (1978:21) says:

We are sometimes accused of not doing what we have not set out to do. How can you give a complete picture of e.g. India in, say, 3,000 words a day? No, we're not and we can't...we must operate on the principle of news as exception. Reuters tries to give a fair picture, a rounded picture, but we can only send a limited amount, and we must be selective.

To support the views of Gerald Long, Rosenblum (1978:21) also note thus:

There is little demand for African news in much of the world, and the cost of maintaining correspondents there are high. International news agencies concentrate on crises centres – Lebanon, the Israeli borders, Southern Africa and pay scant attention to most other areas until they become a “story.”

In furtherance of the western view point on the news flow debate, Uche (1996:124) noted thus:

Using four Anglophone African newspapers (the Kenya Standard, the Daily Times of Nigeria, the times of Zambia and Tanzania's Daily News) to ascertain the effects of the NWICO debate, Cherry found that for newspapers in the developing world, news is defined in western terms and from western perspectives. The study found that 51% of the foreign news items in the sample Anglophone newspapers originated from the west; at the same time the newspapers failed to identify about 59% of the sources of their foreign news items. The study found a high preponderance of emphasis on local issues on the Anglophone newspapers, as does the press in the west. Above all, the study indicted the Anglophone African press for not demonstrating interest in non-western news agencies, foreign news from neighbouring countries, or foreign news about non-western topics.

The United States was therefore poised to fight NWICO and its supporters till the agitation collapses. This she demonstrated by pulling out of UNESCO at a time her financial support was dearly needed. She also encouraged other Western nations to follow suit as typified in the United Kingdom and Singapore examples. While pulling out, the U.S. never made any pretensions about her dislike for the cause which UNESCO was helping to advance (Wu, 2000; Peterson and Sreberny, 2004; Thussu, 2007; Ekeanyanwu, 2008).

Because of such resistance, NWICO remains in the wastebasket of history. Everything about the NFD during this period suggested a sectional discourse that was programmed to fail from the start. Furthermore, the old charges of news bias, slanted portrayals and claims that certain places and people are usually misrepresented, under reported or inaccurately reported are now perspectives as even some third world scholars (See Ekeanyanwu, 2008, 2010) have even stopped bemoaning their fate and are now looking for innovative ways to engage the rest of the world in international communication. Second, the emergence of social media networks, citizen reporters, and other technological mass communication innovations made it possible for most societies to tap into the World Wide Web and other digital and online devices to aggregate, tell and produce their own stories and other informational content.

Some scholars argued at the end of the millennium that if news and other pertinent information continued to interest a large number of people, then the global structure of news gathering and dissemination will follow the economic and political centres of the world (Chang *et al*, 2000). Consequently, many global media organizations would probably prefer to have correspondents and bureaus in New York, Brussels, Paris, and Tokyo than in Niamey, Albania, Khartoum, and other third world cities because the former cities is where economic and technological superiority was concentrated. It was difficulty at the end of the last millennium to argue against the structure of world news as it related to the structure of world politics. The third world global news centres which were not economically industrialized power centres in the world news only did so because the super powers had unique interests in them.

These were partly the reasons the authors regard NWICO as a stillborn. Again, the power structures are not clearly changing. De Beer (2010) notes that the concept of global news “is under theoretical construction, especially as it relates to news flow studies.” Continuing, de Beer (2010:596) notes thus:

News media content in a globalizing world is becoming increasingly deterritorialized, involving complex relations and flows across national borders and continents. Consequently, it also becomes more difficult to categorise news in the traditional binary fashion as either national or international/domestic and foreign news as was the tradition in news flow studies.

De Beer (2010) further observes that the globalization of news flows have shown that the concept, “global news,” could perhaps transcend the dichotomy between international and local news found in most news flow studies. Borrowing from his earlier views, he (de Beer, 2009 and 2010:596) posits that if global news could transcend the dichotomy between international and national,

Then these concepts are in need of more stringent definition. For instance, are the news reports of the global swine flu pandemic, or “blood diamonds” mined in Africa to pay for foreign armaments from European manufacturers, or the recession starting to bite in African countries as the West’s “Credit Crunch” spreads, national or multi-national news? Are these stories bound to specific African countries, or are they rather part of global news,

affecting not only specific countries in Africa, but the world at large (de Beer, 2009 also in de Beer, 2010: 596).

However, most news flow studies have reached a common consensus that the global flow of news follows narrow and ethnocentric media mappings. So, according to Chang et al (2000), the developed and industrialized Western nations dominate the global news flow in terms of what comes in and what goes out. As noted earlier and supported by Turan and colleagues (2009), the small/weak nations only get attention when the “bad” news happens. Sreberny-Mohammadi *et al* (1984) had observed that in the emerging socio-political order, it is not clear where friends and foes are to be found. International news coverage has often had a very close connection to the prevailing attitudes toward international politics (even in societies with the “freest” media), a mediated news map should provide indication of emerging trends in international politics and relations. In other words, international news flow has always been connected to international politics and relations. They also note that such a situation could show whether the geographic regionalism evident in older studies are being reinforced, or whether there are new criteria of selection, using notions of ‘cultural proximity’ such as Islam, for example, that work to construct a cultural, not geographic map of relations.

News Flow Debate and Social Media Networks

The entrance of social media networks into the NFD added a unique twist into the global News Flow Controversy (NFC). They have helped to deconstruct the structure of news gathering and dissemination. De Beer (2010) regards them as informal news institutions which serve as “pervasive agents of globalization as well as democratization”. Social networking sites support the human need for social interaction, using internet and web-based technologies to transform broadcast media monologues (one to many) into social media dialogues (many to many).

Facebook, one of the most popular of the social networks, has been reported to be the most trafficked social networking site with more than 21 million registered members generating 1.6 billion page views each day. The site is tightly integrated into the daily media practices of its users. According to Cassidy (2006), the typical user spends about 20 minutes a day on the site and two-thirds of users log in at least once a day.

The online or virtual community created by the social networking sites is one of a kind. It is an active community and well informed about issues around them. It thrives on interactivity, open conversations and mass participation. This is where the NFD becomes relevant. Before their emergence, traditional or formal media channels seemed to have been weighed down by economic, political and other non professional considerations in the coverage of world news. The social networks thrive on citizens' or civic journalism whereby news democratization has made more and more information available to more persons at a marginal cost.

However, a recent study by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) attempted to compare information flows between social media networks and mainstream media in the United State to argue that global news flow has not really changed much in the era of social media emergence and participation in the news flow process. The study found out that social media and the traditional media usually share the same agenda to some extent:

They tend to be blockbuster events, and they cut across a wide variety of topic areas - the economy, health pandemics, and the deaths of well-known figures. In the 49 weeks studied, blogs and the mainstream press shared the top story just 13times. The storyline shared most was the U.S. economic crisis. Other storylines that drove attention on both platforms included the initial H1N1 flu outbreak in late spring, the June protests in Iran, the death of Senator Edward Kennedy in late August and the shooting at Ford Hood in early November (Pew Research Center's PEJ, 2010).

The Pew Research Center study also found out traces of differences in coverage between social media networks and mainstream traditional media in the United States. The results as presented in the tables below show that the social media are beginning to cast shadows on mainstream traditional media claims to setting public and media agenda.

The weeks in November and December, more than a quarter (27%) of the traditional press' news hole was occupied with the war in Afghanistan as Obama delivered a major speech outlying his plans for the U.S. role there. In the blogs, Afghanistan was the third largest subject of the week, following two very different subjects. First was a vote in Switzerland to ban the building of

minarets, which are distinctive structures associated with Islamic mosques and second was the subject of global warning surrounding the ‘climate-gate’ controversy. On Twitter, Afghanistan was not among the top five stories at all (Pew Research Center’s PEJ, 2010).

Commenting further on their findings, the Project for Excellence in Journalism (2010:1) under its “New Media, Old Media blogosphere” also notes thus:

Of the three social media platforms studied, news-oriented blogs share the most similarities with the mainstream press. Bloggers almost always link to legacy outlets for their information, and politics, government and foreign events garnered the greatest traction. There are, however, also some clear differences. While the biggest topic areas overlap, there was considerable divergence in the specific news events that garnered attention. In less than one third of the weeks did the blogosphere and traditional press share the same top story. Bloggers tend to gravitate toward events that affect personal rights and cultural norms – issues like same-sex marriage, the rationing of health care or privacy settings on Facebook, while traditional media news agendas are more event-driven and institutional. And a strong sense of purpose often accompanies the links in blogs and social networking media. In many cases, it is voicing strongly held and often divisive opinions. After the botched terror attack on Northwest Airlines Flight 253 on Christmas Day, for instance, a number of conservative bloggers immediately blamed Obama, while others claimed that the fear of terrorism had become larger and more irrational than it should be. In others, the function was more to share personal connections to events or to take action.

The summary of these findings are presented in Tables 1 to 4 below. These tables are instructive and empirically supported from extensive field research carried out by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism. They are sourced from the analyzed results of the Pew Research Center's PEJ study.

Table 1: News Topics across Media Platforms

News Topics Across Media Platforms				
January 19, 2009 – January 15, 2010*				
	Blogs (% of stories)	Twitter (% of stories)	YouTube (% of videos)	Traditional Press (% of newshole)
Politics/Government	17%	6%	21%	15%
Foreign Events (non-U.S.)	12	13	26	9
Economy	7	1	1	10
Technology	8	43	1	1
Health and Medicine	7	4	6	11

* Twitter was tracked from June 15, 2009 – January 15, 2010

Table 2: Topics of News Coverage on Twitter

Topics of News Coverage on Twitter	
June 15, 2009 – January 15, 2010	
	Twitter (% of Stories)
Technology	43%
Foreign Events (non-U.S.)	13
Politics/Government	6
Crime	5
Celebrity	5
Science	5
Health and Medicine	4
Environment (including Global Warming)	4
Pop Culture	3
Oddball	3
Race/Gender Relations	2
Disasters/Accidents	2
Terrorism	1
Consumer News	1
Economy	1
Media	1
Sports	1
Weather	1
Other	1

Table 3: Topics of News Coverage: Blogs vs. Traditional Press

Topics of News Coverage: Blogs vs. the Traditional Press		
January 19, 2009 – January 15, 2010		
	Blogs (% of stories)	Traditional Press (% of newshole)
Politics/Government	17%	15%
Foreign Events (non-U.S.)	12	9
Science	10	1
Technology	8	1
Health and Medicine	7	11
Celebrity	7	2
Economy	7	10
Terrorism	6	4
Crime	6	6
Environment (including Global Warming)	4	2
Pop Culture	3	1
Oddball	3	< 1
Gay issues	2	< 1
Consumer News	2	< 1
Education	2	1
Media	2	2
Religion	1	< 1
Immigration	< 1	< 1
Race/Gender Relations	< 1	1
Disasters/Accidents	< 1	2

Table 4: Topics of the most viewed News Videos on YouTube

Topics of the Most Viewed News Videos on YouTube	
January 19, 2009 – January 15, 2010	
	<u>% of videos</u>
Foreign Events (non-U.S.)	26%
Government	20
Entertainment	8
Media	7
Health and Medicine	6
Accidents/Disasters	5
Other Domestic Affairs	4
U.S. Miscellaneous	4
Lifestyle	3
Crime	3
U.S. Foreign Affairs	2
Education	2
Sports	2
Race/Gender/Gay Issues	2
Politics and Campaigns	1
Economy	1
Environment	1
Science and Technology	1
Domestic Terrorism	< 1
Business	< 1
Transportation	< 1

A thorough interpretation and re-examination of the results presented in the tables above, apart from questioning the gatekeeper and agenda setting roles of the mainstream traditional media in the United States, also suggests that the United States media are gradually moving away from mainstream international news coverage and reporting to more of a global media with national outlook. This argument is the focus of the next section of this paper.

Where is the Center of Global News Flow?

The United States media industry before the emergence of social media networks (which is supported by improvements in New Communication Technologies (NCTs)), was arguably the world's new leader in terms of the traffic of news that emanated from the industry about the world. Then, no major happening in the world (in terms of what the West defines as news) escapes the lens of the U.S. media industry.

However, following the economics of decline in the industry, international news coverage and reportage have declined in the United States thus questioning the notion that the United States media industry is the world's news leader. Livingston and Asmolov (2010) agree that the industry's bleak financial condition and the erosion of its basic structural elements, such as overseas bureaus were partly the major causes of this decline. Robinson (2007) also observes that media organizations can no longer afford to maintain expensive foreign bureaus "to report developments that seem of little concern to most readers and viewers in the United States".

To further push forward the thesis of economic downturn as the root cause of the decline in international news coverage in the United States, Livingston and Asmolov (2010: 746-747) argue thus:

Indeed, public indifference to foreign affairs news and its cost are among the chief causes of its decline in recent years. In 2007, advertising revenue for newspapers and their websites dropped 7.9 percent, followed by another 16.6 percent drop in 2008 (Newspaper Association of American, 2010). But the real financial blow came with the 2009 economic crisis when ad revenue for some newspapers dropped 30 percent for the first

quarter, a figure made even more worrisome by an accelerating rate of decline.

In the heat of these crises, thousands of journalists have lost their jobs. In 2008 alone, Massine (2009) reports that newspapers (Journalists) lost 15, 974 jobs, followed by another 10,000 in the first six months of 2009. International news coverage, no doubt, got caught up in the web of this worst economic crisis to hit the U.S. media industry since the new century began.

Livingston and Asmolov (2010) were, however, quick to point out that “not all of the news about the news is bad.” According to their findings, the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal* and the *Los Angeles Times* still maintain a strong international presence in the core and strategic peripheral centres of the world news structure. Within this economic crisis, new sources of international news for the United States audience also emerged. *Global Post* was founded in 2009 and has about 65 correspondents in 50 countries of the world (Allen, 2009). Livingston and Asmolov (2010) also note that *World Focus* is a new television station managed by Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) in the United States which concentrates on global news coverage.

Are these latest trends a sign of hope? Livingston and Asmolov (2010: 747) attempt an answer:

Though it is impossible to say with certainty, it seems reasonable to conclude that a handful of traditional news organizations will continue to devote the resource needed to cover global news responsibly. The wire and video services also must be factored into the equation. They, too, in some configuration, will continue to provide images and copy to domestic services unable or unwilling to post correspondents overseas. In short, a core element of traditional news services will remain, though perhaps leaner than they were during much of the twentieth century.

A closer examination of Livingston and Asmolov (2010) arguments above suggests that their opinion is based on “technological, sociological and political trends that call for a remapping of our conceptual landscape and to a retooling of the vocabulary used for describing journalism and international affairs.” This seems to be in the mind of de Beer (2010) when he argues that the definitions of global vis-à-vis international, transnational, national or foreign are now mired in controversy. Supporting his arguments with works of such scholars as De Vereaux and Griffin (2006), Reese (2001) and Berglez (2008, 2009), de

Beer (2010) notes that such terms assume the nation-state as the basis of analysis of what is national news or international news. Continuing, de Beer (2010) observes that, “it is not a question of foreign news (media reporting about news elsewhere in the world) as such becoming more global in scope, but rather that local (domestic/national) news, also when reported by foreign journalists, are expanding into a new form of global journalism.”

The argument so far is that the terms national and international are now debatable as they relate to news flow on a globalized world. However, whichever way one considers these concepts the questions of whether the United States media system still qualifies as the world’s news leader or whether the center of global news flow has shifted remains apt. With the current economic recession going on right now in the United States media industry, especially the Newspaper arm of it; the rise of citizens journalism and the inevitable dominance of social media networks in opening up the journalism space for greater mass participation and democratization of the news business; the United States has no option than to re-evaluate her reclining role in the global news flow scene or at least acknowledge the emergence of other “powers” in the NFD.

Again, the issues being argued necessitate a re-conceptualization of the terms “journalism” and “journalist”. Tables 1 to 4 as presented earlier in the previous section show that social media channels are already neck deep in setting agendas for public discourse. These results also show that there are similarities in daily or weekly issues for discourse between the social media networks and the traditional media organizations. Where they differ, it is even observed that the public line up behind the social media networks because of it is participatory, interactive and free of obvious charges (cost) nature. Do these mean that social media participants now qualify to be called journalists? Is the interactive and mass participatory nature of social media journalism or the “new journalism”?

It may be difficult to answer all of these questions in this single paper or in one swoop argument. The authors’ major concern is that the news liberalization processes should worry the world acclaimed “News Leader” of the globe – United States. Is this worry substantiated empirically or are we just making conjectures from a few observed happenings?

The Pew Research Center’s project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) carried out series of surveys and studies using different scenarios and still reached similar conclusions on the News Flow Debate. Some of the relevant findings are presented below. These Tables were from field studies carried from January 1, 2010 to December 31, 2010.

Table 5: Geographic Focus of the Stories by Placement or Prominence Attached to the Stories

			Geographic Focus						
Placement/Prom inence			local	U.S. non- local/US national	U.S. intern ation al	Non-U.S. internatio nal	No specific geograp hic focus	To tal	
	front page/most prominent	Count	196	857	254	89	0	13 96	
		% of Total	.4%	1.6%	.5%	.2%	.0%	2.7 %	
	front page/2nd prominent (only if above the fold)	Count	159	674	193	113	0	11 39	
		% of Total	.3%	1.3%	.4%	.2%	.0%	2.2 %	
	front page/other- above the fold	Count	97	527	149	122	1	89 6	
		% of Total	.2%	1.0%	.3%	.2%	.0%	1.7 %	
	front page/other- below the fold	Count	245	1408	255	281	2	21 91	
		% of Total	.5%	2.7%	.5%	.5%	.0%	4.2 %	
	newspaper don't know/cannot tell	Count	0	2	1	1	0	4	
		% of Total	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0 %	
	home page/most prominent	Count	1	1101	281	180	1	15 64	
		% of Total	.0%	2.1%	.5%	.3%	.0%	3.0 %	
	home page/2nd prominent	Count	2	990	303	269	0	15 64	
		% of Total	.0%	1.9%	.6%	.5%	.0%	3.0 %	
	home page/3rd or lower prominent	Count	10	3065	810	805	0	46 90	
		% of	.0%	5.8%	1.5%	1.5%	.0%	8.9	

	Total							%
1st story	Count	0	3548	567	301	0		44 16
	% of Total	.0%	6.7%	1.1%	.6%	.0%		8.4 %
2nd story	Count	0	3569	559	281	0		44 09
	% of Total	.0%	6.8%	1.1%	.5%	.0%		8.4 %
3rd story or later	Count	0	22689	4127	3522	7		30 34 5
	% of Total	.0%	43.1%	7.8%	6.7%	.0%		57. 7%
Total	Count	710	38430	7499	5964	11		52 61 4
	% of Total	1.3%	73.0%	14.3%	11.3%	.0%		10 0.0 %

Table 5 analyzes the prominence placed on the reports in terms of the geographic focus. For instance, whilst 857 domestic news stories (from the U.S.) made the Front Page which is the prominent page, only 89 non U.S. international reports made the Front Pages. Majority of the international stories appeared as mere third story or later stories. This partly answers the question raised early on the depth of U.S. media coverage of international news. Apart from the paucity of international news articles in relation to U.S. local events, most of the international news articles do not get prominent placement in the news hole. They are merely tucked in as third stories which may never be read by the hurrying or busy reader. This again justifies the question about ‘where is the Center of Global News Flow?’

Table 6: Geographic Focus

Geographic Focus	Frequency	Percent
local	710	1.3
U.S. non-local/US national	38430	73.0
U.S. international	7499	14.3
non-U.S. international	5964	11.3
no specific geographic focus	11	.0
Total	52614	100.0

Without meaning to overemphasize this point, Table 6 above clearly shows that only 11% of the entire content of U.S. news flow is about the rest of the world. This is not a problem as all media systems studied since the NFD started have shown glaring evidence of imbalance in their reportage of other countries or continents. But the media system under analysis is the U.S. media system. If the United States media organizations are now local or best national, who is then covering the world? Where is then the Center of Global News Flow? Can the U.S. continue to hold on to the global news leader title it rightly earned in the early 80s and 90s? Does this suggest a refocus of the NFD in line with current realities?

These questions are begging for answers. However, we are convinced of two things: the NFD should refocus on current realities and that the U.S. grip on the global news flow scene is gradually easing off! The economic situation of most of the media industries in the United States and the availability of almost free alternatives as evidenced in the social media networks clearly suggest that the U.S. media industry is heading towards more and more local/national news coverage and less and less international news coverage emphasis. This is still a hypothesis but one based on empirical findings that supports it. The picture as presented in Table 6 above may not likely change immediately. We see a situation where U.S. Local and non-local/US national news coverage will move to about 90% from the present 74.3% presented in Table 6.

Table 7: Broad Story Topic

Broad Story Topic	Frequency	Percent
Government Agencies/Legislatures	4636	8.8
Campaigns/Elections/Politics	5124	9.7
Defense/Military (Domestic)	885	1.7
Court/Legal System	444	.8
Crime	2670	5.1
Domestic Terrorism	1517	2.9
Business	2038	3.9
Economy/Economics	4890	9.3
Environment	830	1.6
Development/Sprawl	17	.0
Transportation	537	1.0
Education	680	1.3
Religion	586	1.1

Health/Medicine	2611	5.0
Science And Technology	797	1.5
Race/Gender/Gay Issues	718	1.4
Immigration	781	1.5
Additional Domestic Affairs	951	1.8
Disasters/Accidents	4787	9.1
Celebrity/Entertainment	418	.8
Lifestyle	1834	3.5
Sports	1243	2.4
Media	796	1.5
U.S. Miscellaneous	2262	4.3
U.S. Foreign Affairs	4598	8.7
Foreign (Non U.S.)	5964	11.3
Total	52614	100.0

Table 8: Media Sector

Media Sector	Frequency	Valid Percent
Newspaper	5626	10.7
Online	7818	14.9
Network TV	13016	24.7
Cable TV	17087	32.5
Radio	9067	17.2
Total	52614	100.0

Table 7 shows the spread of subjects or topics the U.S. media are talking about during the period while Table 8 shows the quantity of news materials that emanated from the different sectors of the media.

Conclusion

News Flow studies have remained a valid area of scholarship since the early 80s. Scholars have continued to ask questions on what influences coverage and why some are favoured and others are not. These questions are not rhetorical but the answers maybe farfetched. However, the United States has continued to maintain her dominance on the global flow of information not until recent happenings in the Information Technology world as well as the economic recession threatening the traditional media systems in that country. How will all of these play

out? Is the U.S. still able to exact her dominance on the news flow issue in her current economic crisis? These are valid questions still waiting for answers.

This paper, however, using secondary data from the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (2010), concludes that the United States coverage of the world has shifted focus in terms of the quantity of news about non-U.S. that you can find in the U.S. media. Whether this is cost situated or that there are other predictive factors causing this is still an area to research into. Our major submission here is that if the trend continues unabated in the next five years, United States will cease to be the world news leader in terms of being the eyes and ears of the globe.

To the primary objectives and research questions we set out with, it appears that the recent happenings in the global news space with particular reference to the emergence of social media networks nullifies any leftover legitimacy or even credibility to the NFD. Social media have made it easy for "everyone" to be informed in either mainstream traditional journalism or peripheral citizen journalism. There are now multiple sources for news gathering and dissemination and greater access and mass participation in the news production and distribution business. This implies that no nation or people could justify any further cry of marginalization in how they are covered or reported. The social media networks have liberalized the process to encourage popular participation.

In the same thinking, we are inclined to conclude here that traditional media are no longer setting the public or media agenda alone. The emergence of social media networks has reset the calculations, opened up the space and attracted more participation in what people think they should be talking about. It will be therefore, in our own interpretation of the recent results in news flow studies, wrong to still conclude that the traditional news media are the sole agenda setters. Social media networks are in this for real and it does not look like their popularity is about to wane.

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